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Contact: Julie Roberts Telephone (802) 373-8673
Email julie.roberts.uvm@gmail.com

UVM's faculty union declares impasse on COVID-19 impact bargaining

Burlington, Vermont: After two and a half months, the impact bargaining process between United Academics, the faculty union of the University of Vermont, and the UVM administration has reached impasse. This impact bargaining concerned UVM's fall reopening processes and their effects on faculty during the COVID-19 pandemic.

After United Academics filed an unfair labor practice demanding that the University administration bargain the workplace impacts of COVID-19 with the union, the impact bargaining process was initiated as a term of a settlement. Some points of agreement have been reached on issues such as the faculty pledge, travel policy for employees, and the required daily health check-in.

The union also made headway on one policy aimed at supporting faculty who are caregivers: automatically extending the tenure clock for pre-tenure faculty.

However, there remain significant and important areas of disagreement.

Primary areas of faculty concern that the Administration has declined to address include:

- Faculty choice to teach remotely due to health and safety concerns
- Limiting the use of student course evaluations during the COVID crisis against faculty in promotion and reappointment decisions
- Including compensation for the weeks of off-contract training and course preparation required to shift courses for the fall semester

The administration's bargaining team signaled an unwillingness to make progress toward the union's proposals.

UA requested the following on behalf of University faculty and the community:

- Faculty should be able to shift to remote or hybrid instruction (teaching modality) for health and safety concerns or in the event of childcare/school closure. The Administration rejected these proposals, asserting that faculty should not be able to make changes due to 'health and safety concerns'. A number of faculty who have requested to shift from teaching in-person to teaching remotely have been denied and required to continue to teach in-person regardless of their concerns.
- Daily updates to the number of positive COVID-19 test results on campus. The Administration has also rejected requests by UA and others to post these, despite having the data available.

Said Julie Roberts, United Academics President and UVM Professor of Linguistics for over 25 years: "Our union bargaining team had hoped the administration would be more willing to establish policies to support and protect our faculty and our community. We have seen other employers proactively support working parents, job insecure employees, and those with deep and understandable concerns for their safety and that of their families."

The next phase of negotiations will continue with the assistance of a mediator. Roberts continued, "We hope that during the next stage of this process the university administration will develop a fairer and more humane approach to working with faculty."

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About United Academics: UVM United Academics represents over 700 full-time and 100 part-time faculty at UVM and is affiliated with AFT Vermont, which represents 5000 higher education and healthcare professionals in Vermont, and AAUP.